

Health & Living

Re-introducing Tamarijn to Aruba



Familiarity breeds contempt. This is an old saying which time has shown to be true. On Aruba we have evidence of this in our own backyards. Consider how we treat and view our faithful, undemanding friend, the humble tamarijn. Against hostile environmental conditions and human abuse the tree has held its own, continuing to flourish whenever we let it. Yet, we chop it down, even when it's not in the way. We let its fruit drop to the ground and rot.

Does this tree deserve such neglect? Let's see.

When it arrived on Aruba some 200 years ago from Venezuela, it was a god-send. The quality of its wood was the best for hut construction – tough, termite-resistant; ideal for charcoal production. Its leaves and fruit provided most of the nutrients its growers needed at a time when human survival depended on the things the land – and sea – provided. As was the mango, the tamarijn found a home in Savaneta and Santa Cruz areas where it still flourishes.

But, as time went by and big businesses took over, and got us hooked on their manufactured stuff, we spurned old-time things viewing them

as things belonging to the very poor. Victims of this sophistication is the tamarijn and the shimarucu. They both now keep each other's company in the cunucus.

No country can return to its roots because time and methods march on. But we could return to our roots to the extent that we recognize and exploit their benefits. We are not aware of it but big businesses are doing this. **They** exploit plants **we** spurn. They re-constitute and package them, and convince us that there are the cures of this, that and the other. And we pay through our noses for them, often not to our benefit.

If what I've said above has kindled any remorse in you, take time to look in depth at our presently ignored tamarijn.

As a food source. It does not rate highly as being essential. Neither is Aruba's common variety pleasant-tasting, it's known to be too acidic, and we being to sweet-toothed. But—this is important—Aruba now has a variety which is so sweet that it is addictive. Some of these are available at supermarkets at high prices: +/- 20 Aruban florins per kilo. But on Ari Lichtenstein's Land Farm

and elsewhere recently-planted trees are bearing fruit in abundance. Even our sour variety can be made into a host of delicacies: juices, candies, pastes and preserves.

For nutritional and medicinal purposes. Here, our tamarijn ranks among the most valuable of fruit trees. Centuries of testing and experimenting world-wide have firmly established its claim for a high place in our diet. These claims have not been touted by TV or other sales entrepreneurs but by the real-life experiences of common people. The pulp is loaded with minerals and vitamins, tannins, saponins, sesquiterpenes, alkaloids, phlobaphenes, calcium and iron. The list of ailments it treats goes on and on, including asthma, antiviral, anti-septic, skin infections, boils, chest pain, cholesterol disorder, dry mouth, indigestion, sore throat, urinary stones, liver problems, scurvy, constipation, liver disorders---. As a matter of fact, there seems to be no ailment that tamarijn is not good for. Even its bark and leaves join the fight against disease and other problems. For example, Malaysians claim that their elephants are the most intelligent because they are fed the leaves and bark of the tamarind tree. (Something for us to think about).

However, there is something to be said not in its favor. I speak from experience. The best whips were made from its twigs. The Tambran (the Trinidad name) whip was the toughest, most durable and most stinging, rivaled only by the hibiscus. In my boyhood days, in Trinidad schools it was as present as chalk, pencils and pens, because the guiding principle was: "Spare the whip and spoil the child." My teacher Harry was a firm believer in this principle.

Tamarijn is Aruba's common name. Countries throughout the tropics, from India to Africa to South America and the Caribbean, have claimed it and named it as they see fit. Tamarein (Curacao), Tambran (Trinidad), Tamarindo (Venezuela and Colombia) Ma-kham (Thailand), and Sampaloc (the Philippines).

Its scientific name is *Tamarindus indica*.

By Isaac Chin